The Home of the Waltham Watch

Abt 1903

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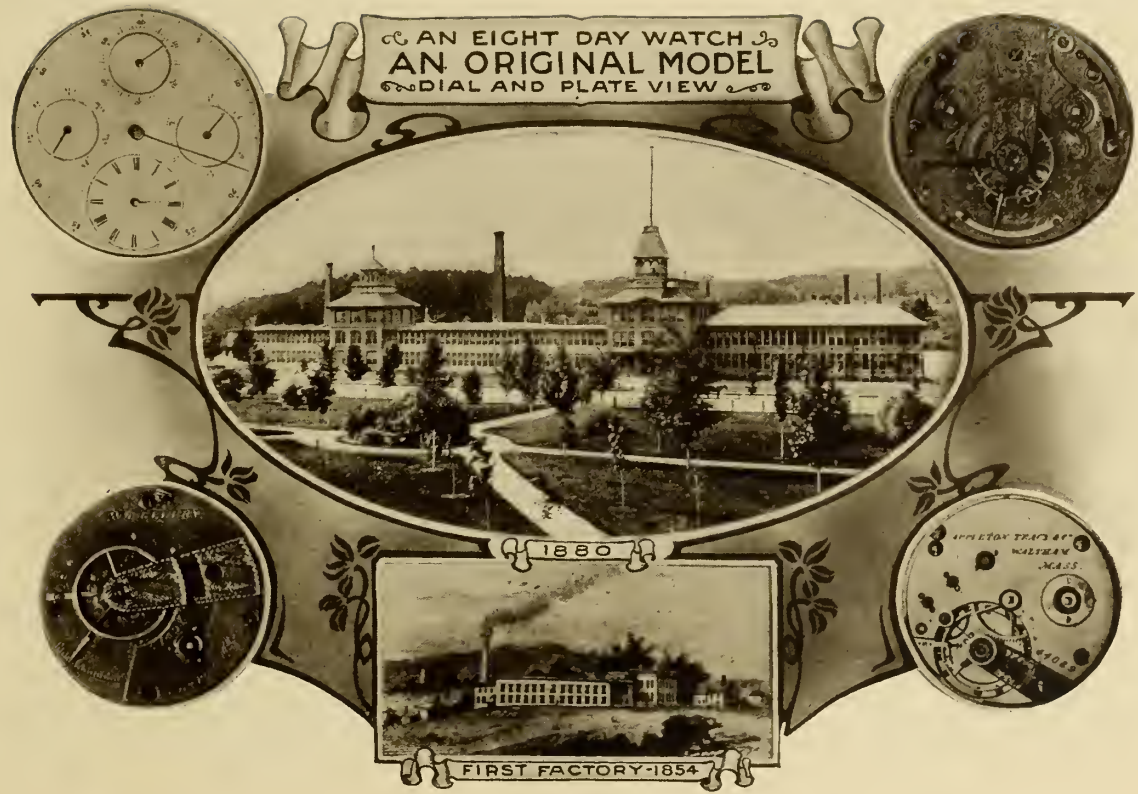


Photographs by E. M. Foster.

WALTHAM, best known as the "City of Watches," is beautifully situated by the River Charles about which so much has been said and sung. The great watch industry that has sprung up within its borders has made the city of Waltham world-famous, yet Waltham existed as a town, and was worthy of note, before it produced the first watch.

Many years before the pocket watch was looked upon as a necessity, when hour glasses and sun dials were still doing duty, the town of Waltham met the pressing need of the citizens of the young Republic, by presenting to the world the first complete cotton mill. This was in 1813, just forty years before the selection of the site for the factory of what is now the Waltham Watch Company.

CITY OF WALTHAM

Late in 1853, then, standing upon Prospect Hill and looking toward the south bank of the Charles River, one might have seen amid the tangle of green by the river side, the rising walls of a small building which was to shelter and develop the great idea destined to revolutionize watch-making the world over;— that all watch parts should be machine made with such accuracy and uniformity as to be interchangeable. Every improvement in method and machinery has been in the line of the development of this idea, which has given to the world the inexpensive and yet reliable American watch.

1854

The simply constructed buildings which met the first needs of the enterprise underwent comparatively little change for a long time, and gave no promise of the extension and perfectly equipped plant of the present.

At the time of the selection of the factory site, it was remote from the center of the town, its only neighbors on the entire south side being a few farm houses. To-day the wide and beautiful streets of the south side, its well-kept grounds, its substantial and pleasant homes, afford the greatest contrast to the loneliness and undeveloped possibilities of fifty years ago. The isolation of the factory, however, was a distinct advantage, permitting as it did the unrestricted development of ideal surroundings.

1865

The average person, looking for the first time upon the beautiful system of parks opposite, and extending the entire length of the buildings, sees in them nothing more than a very successful attempt to please the eye. This is far from being the whole object in view. Restful as the stretches of soft green and many shaded trees undoubtedly are to eyes weary from close attention to perhaps the finest mechanical work in the world, their chief value lies in their affording an almost dustless environment, a most important consideration in the manufacture of the delicate watch mechanism.

ROBBINS PARK

Protected at the rear by the Charles River, and with a well-sprinkled street and a chain of parks at the front, the danger from dust is practically eliminated.

It has been possible to give to buildings, constructed especially for manufacturing purposes, artistic lines and fine architectural effects, and one can indeed look with respect upon the massive and dignified structure that is the home of the Waltham watch. Its wings and towers break the general severity of outline, and its hundreds upon hundreds of windows betoken the abundant admission of that which is more essential than all, light.

CRESCENT, MAPLE AND PROSPECT STREETS

FROM CENTER TOWER—LOOKING NORTH

FROM NORTH TOWER—LOOKING NORTH

Probably few industries call for more perfect lighting than watchmaking. There must be a clear, all-pervading light, yet without glare, softly tempered to the eye, both by day and night.

The long, rather narrow, work rooms, with a row of large windows at either side supplied with thousands of lights of special hand made glass, designed to throw to the center of the room a clear white light; the soft color of the paint on the walls and ceilings; separate curtains for the upper and lower sash of each window in order that light may be admitted from above or below as needed; the abundance of movable screens provided;—all these aids are none too many to relieve the constant strain of the delicate work upon the eyes of the operatives.

FROM NORTH TOWER—LOOKING SOUTH

SCREW DEPARTMENT

ESCAPEMENT DEPARTMENT

VIEW OF FACTORY FROM FITCH PARK. BUILDING 1000 FEET LONG

Although largely depending upon the offices of "Old Sol" by day, the Company has reposed no confidence in outside means for providing lights by night, and has a perfectly equipped electric plant of its own, supplying the necessary power for the thousands of incandescent electric lights, the powerful arc lamps and the wonderful Hewitt Mercury Vapor lights that are used throughout the factory. In the early dusk of the long winter days, the countless lights which gleam and glow make the place of toil, when seen from without, almost like fairyland.

While the home of the Waltham watch is itself a very interesting study, the people who give life to this home are of greater interest. Seeing the throng on its way to work, one is impressed at once with the difference in quality between this and any other crowd of operatives employed in factories. The faces for the most part are those of intelligent American men and women, capable of worthy thought and action in any direction in which citizenship of the Commonwealth or the country may lead them. They are dressed neatly and well, with every indication of taste and a sense of propriety.

The mystery of their superiority is solved when we remember that these are mostly skilled workers, and as such must be of a different order from those who perform tasks of less intricacy and delicacy.

Many use the factory experience only as a stepping-stone for another ambition; doctors, lawyers, ministers and teachers have learned watch factory work as the means to a desirable end, and many a snug home has been furnished with the proceeds of labor done here.

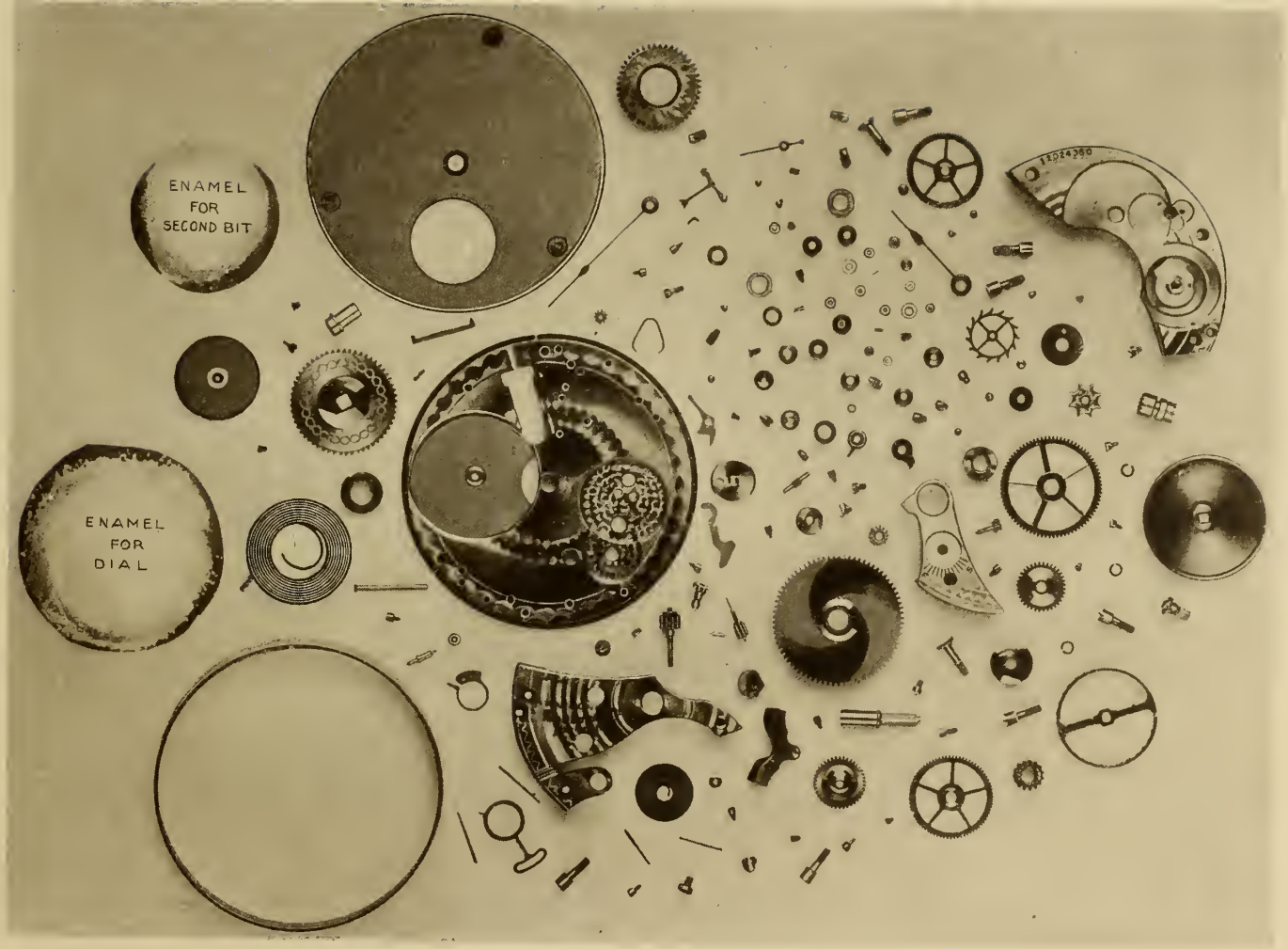
Besides this class which is ever changing, the factory has also a staying element among its workers. There are men and

women who have been employed in the watch factory twenty, thirty and even forty years, who have built their homes and supported their families by their labor here, and who have become so thoroughly a part of the life of Waltham that no temptation could be presented which would lure them elsewhere for more than a brief stay. As an evidence of this, one needs only to traverse the well kept streets of the city of Waltham and note the attractive, substantial homes owned and occupied by watchmakers, surrounded as they are with beautifully laid out grounds adorned with all kinds of flowering plants and shrubs, and gardens with rows of thrifty vegetables of every variety and kind.

APPLETON AND FITCH PARKS—FROM CENTER TOWER

A person unaccustomed to watching four thousand people at work, making such a marvelous mechanism as a watch, carries away only a confused recollection of busy workers, balances, jewels, grinding, polishing, finishing, matching, with here and there a vision of errand boys pushing trucks laden with unfinished watch parts, placed carefully into trays.

Still, from out all this tangle, the average visitor can separate the recollection of those wonderful screw machines, with their movements so like those of human fingers, as the automatic hand picks the tiny screw from one part of the machine and places it in another as the work progresses, until, presto! instead of the wire which was fed into the receiver, out drops the finished screw, thread, slot and all.



PARTS OF ONE 16 SIZE WALTHAM WATCH MOVEMENT—ACTUAL SIZE

One also remembers the girls who sit with bent heads and knitted brows, as, tools in hand, they perform the trying task of "setting up" the finished parts to a complete watch. Very wearing to the nerves is this delicate work, and only young women who possess unusual mechanical ability, coupled with steady hand and perfect eyesight become successful in this department of watchmaking. The high standard of work required and the severe inspection after every operation, insure the reliability of the Waltham watch.

"SETTING UP" DEPARTMENT

After factory hours, the throngs of contented men and women employees find rest and recreation in their homes or boarding places. Many of the girls live at the Adams House, which furnishes a convenient haven for a hundred or two girls. This is the Watch Company's boarding house, and presents an appearance of comfort and ease, with its broad veranda, scattered over with rockers and hammocks, reminding one of a summer hotel.

A glance into the dining room heightens this impression. There are small, cosy, and as well appointed tables as will be found in the best homes. There is every convenience which could well be asked, and yet the price of living is the lowest to be found.

ADAMS HOUSE

The churches of Waltham, particularly those on the south side of the river, are composed principally of factory employees, and clubs and various organizations for social and benevolent objects are sustained largely by watchmakers.

There have been organized among the workmen foot-ball, bowling and base-ball leagues made up from the various departments of the factory, and great interest is shown in these sports, especially when rival teams are battling for the championship.

ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTERS. CHAMPIONSHIP GAME BETWEEN THE JEWELING AND FLAT STEEL DEPT. BASE BALL NINES

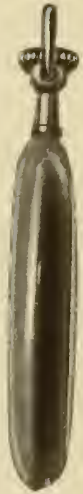
So the home of the Waltham watch contains a harmonious, energetic, progressive people, who though they have manufactured fifteen millions of watch movements, yet are to-day, from the highest officer of the Company to the smallest errand boy, working to improve, wherever it is possible, the already "Perfected American Watch," and to meet the demand for millions more Waltham Watches.

18 SIZE

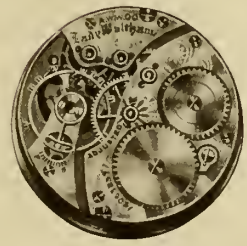
16 SIZE

12 SIZE

COLONIAL SERIES



6 SIZE



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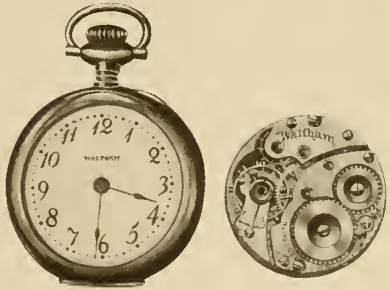
JEWEL SERIES



10 LIGNE

WALTHAM WATCH MOVEMENTS

(Actual Size)

LAMONT, Photo.

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